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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: social integration

Statement by the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

Statement
Social integration of minority populations

1. In 1995, the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action set out a vision of creating "a society for all" in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities has an active role to play. Social integration was described as both a goal and a process that societies engage in to advance social development.

2. Fifteen years after Copenhagen, many individuals and social groups remain marginalized and excluded in many countries. In many cases, the excluded suffer from multiple disadvantages which often include poverty, lack of education, poor housing, poor health, lack of access to services and discrimination.

3. Ninety per cent of the world's countries have a minority population of at least 10 per cent (Club de Madrid, 2009). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than 200 countries have significant minority ethnic or religious communities. Almost 900 million people belong to groups that experience disadvantages as a result of their minority standing.

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4. Although specific historical, economic, social, political and geographic factors contribute to varied experiences of minority groups in different countries, common problems are identifiable. Often, these problems are related to the existence of structures or systems that have the effect of perpetuating the marginalization of minority groups from decision-making and of unfairly benefiting majority populations or dominant groups in the economic, social and political life of the country.

5. The Committee for Social Development conducted a survey on social integration in the summer of 2009. The more than 200 responses from many parts of the world where our constituents work identify the same societal attitudes accompanied by discriminatory laws and practices which contribute to exclusion from education, employment, housing, health care and decision-making as major barriers experienced by minority populations to social integration. One respondent stated: "People want to belong, to be persons who count, to be consulted and to have their say in matters important to them. Without structures that offer them this scope they feel helpless, lost and as nobodies. When they feel helpless, they attach themselves to divisive and exclusive identities" (Neighborhood Community Network, India).

6. Although, in its origin, Hungary's Minorities Law was explicitly assimilationist and the focus of controversy since its inception, it was hailed as an innovative response to the needs of its minorities. The Council of Europe called the provision for self-government "rare" and the achievements of the law "highly progressive".

7. The central organizing principle of the law is cultural autonomy for all national and ethnic minority groups. Under the law, minority groups can preserve their own languages, culture and traditions. The provision for minority education and minority self-government strengthens the unique identity of each group. Over the past 20 years, 12 different minority populations took advantage of this law to enter into the Hungarian political system at both local and national levels. Members of the Roma community, which is Hungary's largest as well as its most socio-economically disadvantaged and marginalized minority, participated in a survey whose results suggest that minority self-governance has begun to reconfigure the shape of local politics. It can be an important step towards local democratization, political participation and minority self-determination and local development (The Hungarian Quarterly, vol. 40, No. 155, Autumn 1999; Fact Sheets on Hungary No. 3/2000, http://www.mfa.gov.hu).

8. The European Commission looked specifically for successful Roma integration at its peer review meeting in October 2006. The experience in Aviles, Spain, which has been in process since 2000 was put forward. Roma communities were rehoused out of shanty towns into standard accommodations with non-Roma populations. In addition to rehousing, there were improvements in employment, education and health, including several factors that have made a difference: commitment by government departments at various levels; municipal leadership; a long-term approach; an integrated strategy addressing multiple factors affecting exclusion; client-centred services; and monitoring of progress. "A crucial component underpinning the effectiveness of these initiatives is the high level of participation, commitment and involvement of Roma organizations and beneficiaries, coupled

with the high expectations and enthusiasm of non-Roma personnel working for it" (http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/index_eu.htm).

9. The Australian Government has recently launched the Australian Public Service social inclusion and policy design and delivery toolkit (www.socialinclusion.gov.au) "The toolkit aims to help in the task of translating social inclusion principles and priorities into the daily practice of government and public administration" (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Inclusion, Julia Gillard). The toolkit contributes to the achievement of the Government's vision for a socially inclusive society in which, "... all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity and capability to learn, work, engage and have a voice ...". The toolkit could be replicated and adapted in other countries, including its sound design of: the social inclusion situation in Australia, its six-step method of policy design and delivery of services, practical examples and additional resources.

10. The Club de Madrid's "Shared Societies Project" outlines a vision and principles involved in building shared societies, and a "world safe for differences". It focuses on the role of leadership in working with others to create ... "peaceful, democratic and prosperous (societies) when leaders and citizens recognize the economic, social and political value of diversity and actively build a shared society" (Shared Societies Project). It includes 10 areas of policy commitments that are needed to build such a society.

Recommendations for Governments

- Reaffirm the commitment to Copenhagen and the promotion and protection of all human rights.
- Review existing national and local laws and policies and eliminate those that are discriminatory.
- Commit to long-term action plans that transform policy and to social services that include and are of benefit to all minority groups within the country.
- Involve minority groups in establishing educational processes that expand their opportunities and capabilities for employment and livelihood and their active participation in the life of the community.

Note:

This statement has been endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council:

Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, International Presentation Association, Loretto Community, Salesian Missions and Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries